

CITY SETS COCAINE-BUST RECORD

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Author: JOE SWICKARD Free Press Staff Writer

The biggest cocaine case ever successfully prosecuted in Detroit ended Monday with the first conviction by a Michigan jury under a four-year-old drug law that carries mandatory life sentences for large-scale dealers.

The Recorder's Court jury of 11 women and a man deliberated less than an hour before convicting two Colombians, Herman Cortez, 28, and Fernado Gonzalez, 31, of possessing 1,120 grams (about 2.5 pounds) of cocaine with the intent to deliver.

The cocaine -- termed "very pure" by Michigan State Police -- had an estimated street value of \$183,000 to \$750,000, depending on how much it would have been diluted for retail sale.

Merquiades Cespedes, once a co-defendant with Cortez and Gonzalez, had already been convicted in the case after a bench trial conducted by Judge Michael Talbot.

UNDER MICHIGAN'S revised drug laws, passed in 1978, possession of more than 650 grams (about 23 ounces) of an illegal drug with the intent to deliver it to another person carries a mandatory life prison sentence.

The law is designed to give increasingly harsh penalties based on the amount of drugs involved. Thus, those convicted of possessing less than 650 grams get shorter prison terms.

"The message and purpose of the law is that if you're dealing big amounts and get caught, it's goodbye," said James WoucZYna, the assistant Wayne County prosecutor who tried the case.

WoucZYna also said his office is opposing any effort to deport Cortez and Gonzalez, who gave New York **City** addresses, as illegal aliens.

"Cortez has been deported twice already, and Gonzalez has already been deported once," he said. "No way we'll go for that again. If we deported them, they'll just be back in a couple of months trying to run the same old game."

WOU CZYNA SAID Detroit narcotics officers "lucked into" the huge seizure when they raided an apartment on the 1600 block of Twenty-fourth Street on March 31, 1981.

He said a police informant had bought a small amount of cocaine at the apartment the night of March 30 and that police, using that information, got a search warrant the next day.

According to police, Cortez and Gonzalez had arrived with the large cocaine shipment only about two hours before the apartment was raided.

"The police never expected to find that much there," Wuczyna said. "They just thought they were going to get the much smaller amount their informant had seen the night before. It was lucky, lucky, lucky."

Gonzalez will be sentenced Friday, Cortez May 21.

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